



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development
Office of the State Director Florida/USVI
P.O. Box 147010, Gainesville, FL 32614 . Email: ellen.boukari@fl.usda.gov
Web: www.rurdev.usda.gov/fl/

Contact Ellen Boukari (352) 338-3414

SOUTHEAST MILK, INC. RECEIVES USDA GRANT FOR AGRI-BUSINESS MARKET DEVELOPMENT

BELLEVIEW, FL, Oct. 15, 2004 — Belleview based Southeast Milk, Inc., today received a USDA Rural Development grant to spur economic growth in the state. Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced on Wednesday the approval of 97 value-added agricultural product market development grants in 34 states, totaling over \$13.1 million. The grants will help farmers and ranchers increase their economic opportunities through the development of new products and markets for agriculturally based products. "The Bush Administration is committed to providing the necessary tools to help rural businesses create jobs and improve the quality of life for their communities," said Veneman.

Southeast Milk has been awarded a Value-Added Producer Grant for \$185,000 to investigate the marketing and technical feasibility of converting dairy effluent into value-added products. Products to be examined are bio-energy, citrus fertilizer, fertilizer feed stock and liquid fertilizer. Southeast Milk, Inc., a cooperative representing over 305 dairy producers in the southeast, including 170 dairy producers in the State of Florida, will provide a matching contribution of \$185,000. Florida dairy producers are looking to larger dairy operations to assist the industry in benefiting from economies of scale. However, large dairy farms produce concentrated effluent waste streams that can potentially cause adverse environmental impacts, especially in light of Florida's climate and environment. For economical as well as environmental reasons, a zero-discharge for Central Florida is an attractive alternative.

Participants in the planning project include IMC Phosphates, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the University of Florida and the Florida Department of Agriculture. IMC Phosphates will use their expertise in nutrient chemistry and nutrient recovery and in designing and operating zero-discharge phosphate facilities in Central Florida, while the Florida Department of Environmental Protection is working with the producers in developing value-added products that will meet FDEP's standards. The University of Florida and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will assist and advise in the evaluation of the technical and marketing feasibility of the value-added products.

Representing USDA Rural Development at today's check presentation ceremony were Peter J. Thomas, Administrator, USDA Rural Development Rural Business and Cooperative Programs, Washington, D.C. and USDA Rural Development State Director Charles W. Clemons, Sr. "It is critical that Florida's dairy industry continue to look for ways to increase economic value while protecting our environment as well. It benefits not only the industry but the state of Florida as a whole given the importance of dairy farms to our economy and citizens," said Clemons.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available by contacting any USDA Service Center or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/fl>

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